

Chapter 4

Before the Storm: Sam Yorty's Second Election as Mayor of Los Angeles

California Policy Options 2021

Daniel J.B. Mitchell

Professor-Emeritus, UCLA Anderson School of Management
and UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs

A chapter in an earlier volume of *California Policy Options* dealt with the 1961 election of Sam Yorty as mayor of Los Angeles, an election he wasn't supposed to win. Or, at least, it was an election the downtown city elite led by the *Los Angeles Times* believed that he couldn't and shouldn't win.¹ The *Times* and the powers-that-were downtown had persuaded the incumbent mayor – Norris Poulson – to seek a third term, which he did reluctantly. From their viewpoint, Poulson was a good mayor who did what the downtown elite thought he should be doing.

Yorty, whom the *Times* regarded as a dangerous incompetent, won the election using lawsuits and charges against Poulson, harnessing – among other issues – a requirement that the city under Poulson had imposed on homeowners to separate trash for recycling. The Yorty campaign relied heavily on television, including creating newsworthy coverage with his charges to obtain free TV coverage. In a way, the election of Yorty was an early sign that the control of the city was shifting out of the hands of the downtown elite. When Yorty won, the *Times* despaired editorially for the fate of the city.

Despite some resemblance of Yorty's 1961 tactics to those of Donald Trump in 2016, Yorty – unlike Trump – had significant experience in government before 1961 in the state legislature and Congress. And, as it turned out during Yorty's first term in spite of the *Times'* fears, the potholes were filled, the traffic lights continued to operate, and the garbage was collected, albeit without trash separation. Reasonable and competent people administered the City.

Moreover, once elected, Yorty saw it to his advantage to win over the *Times* by engaging in the kind of civic boosterism to promote economic growth the downtown elite favored. By the time he ran successfully for reelection in 1965, the *Times* endorsed his candidacy. Shortly after his election, however, things went terribly wrong when a traffic stop in the Watts area by the California Highway Patrol led to unforeseen events.

Yorty also ran for reelection in 1969 and 1973 for a third and fourth term. Those campaigns are the ones for which he is most remembered. In both of those elections, his opponent was city council member Tom Bradley, an African American and former police officer who was castigated by Yorty as a dangerous radical black nationalist. Yorty's racially-charged tactics succeeded in 1969 in getting him reelected, but they failed in 1973. Bradley's victory in 1973, led to his long service – five terms and 20 years! – as mayor of Los Angeles, and two unsuccessful runs for governor of California. In 1969 and 1973, the *Times*, what remained of the downtown elite, and a newly-forming coalition of African Americans and the liberal Westside Jewish community, became the Bradley base.

The 1965 city election is now largely forgotten when compared with the racial drama of the contests of 1969 and 1973, and the upset nature of Yorty's first election to the mayoralty in 1961. As noted, it came shortly before a major turning point in Los Angeles history, the August 1965 Watts Riot (or Watts Uprising or Watts Rebellion as it was later termed). Post-Watts, Los Angeles history began to move in one direction and Yorty in another. Yet there was no hint of the soon-to-occur events of Watts in the mayoral election of 1965, more correctly, none that the owners of, and most readers of, the *LA Times* would have seen. That is the story we will tell below.

¹Daniel J.B. Mitchell, "The Trash-Talking Candidate Who Wasn't Supposed to Win," *California Policy Options* 2018 (UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs, 2018), pp. 134-156. Available at <https://archive.org/details/YortyCPO2018>.

Watts: McCone's Revelations

In the aftermath of Watts, then-Governor Pat Brown appointed a commission to study the causes and implications of the disturbance and to write a report outlining remedies. The Commission did so in a little over three months.² What the commission had to say certainly did have the full attention of the *Times*, its readers, and the downtown establishment. No one in Los Angeles could have failed to take note of Watts after August 1965, nor of what the governor's commission had to say about it. Indeed, the episode was major national news.

Members

The McCone Commission, as it came to be known due to its chair, John A. McCone, a former CIA director, was put together in a political balancing act. McCone was a Republican establishment figure. In contrast, the vice chair was Warren M. Christopher, an establishment Democrat who had been a speechwriter for Governor Brown (and who went on eventually to become Secretary of State under President Bill Clinton).³

From the ranks of the downtown LA elite, the Commission included as a member Asa V. Call, chair of Pacific Mutual Insurance Company, who was credited as the founder of the elite's so-called Committee of 25.⁴ From religion, it included the Very Reverend Charles S. Cassasa, the Jesuit chancellor of Loyola University (now Loyola Marymount) and the Reverend James Edward Jones, a Presbyterian and member (and later president) of the LA School Board. Jones was an African American. Also representing the African American community was Earl S. Broady, a judge and former Los Angeles police officer.

UCLA (and academia, apart from Loyola) was represented by Sherman M. Mellinkoff, dean of the UCLA Medical School. Only one woman served on the Commission, Marlen E. Neumann, a past president of the LA League of Women Voters. The general counsel and executive director of the McCone Commission was Thomas R. Sheridan, a former prosecutor. His deputy was Harold W. Horowitz, a former official of the federal Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, UCLA law professor (and later a long-time vice chancellor at UCLA).

It may seem surprising to modern eyes that there was no Latino representation on the Commission. Indeed, the word Latino was not in wide usage. Census data referred only to "Spanish surname" in that era and included that classification as a subdivision of white. The *Times* in the mid-1960s used either Latin (rarely) or Mexican-American as a designation.⁵

In 1965, the U.S. Bureau of the Census reported that only about a tenth of the population in the area of the disturbance fell within the Spanish surname classification and that the number and percentage in

²*Violence in the City – An End or a Beginning*, Report by the Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, December 2, 1965. Available at <https://archive.org/details/ViolenceInCity>.

³Christopher was later to chair his own "Christopher Commission" which wrote the official report on the Rodney King beating by police, a precipitating event of the LA Riot of 1992.

⁴Margaret Leslie Davis, *The Culture Broker: Franklin D. Murphy and the Transformation of Los Angeles* (University of California Press, 2007, p. 84.

⁵Words such as Latino and Chicano did exist at the time but were not used in the *Times*.

that area of Spanish surname individuals had fallen since 1960.⁶ The mid-1960s had not yet seen the immigration surge brought about by population and economic pressures in Mexico and later military and civil conflict in Central America. For all of the LA-Long Beach SMSA, Spanish surname individuals accounted for about 9% of the population in 1960, and 80% of them were native-born. African Americans accounted for about 7%.⁷ In contrast, in 2019, Census estimate for LA County was that 49% of the total population was “Hispanic or Latino,” the white-non-Hispanic population was 26%, Asians accounted for 15%, and African Americans accounted for 9%.⁸

Causal Factors

Governor Brown’s specific charge to the Commission, as noted, was to draw up a chronology of what happened in Watts, look into the causes, and make recommendations. As part of the report, the Commission estimated that the African American population of LA County had grown rapidly during and after World War II and had reached 650,000 by 1965. The basis for that estimate is not entirely clear; however, the official report indicates that “two-thirds” of the African-American community lived in the area of the disorders.

That fraction would put the African-American population there at something over 430,000. A later special report by the U.S. Bureau of the Census put the African-American population of *its* definition of South LA at just under 260,000.⁹ The Commission further estimated that two percent of that population took part in the disorder, i.e., 5,200 - 8,600 individuals, depending on which estimate is accepted (although the report’s introduction says it might have been as many as 10,000). It is unclear from the report where the two percent estimate and the estimate of 10,000 originated and their basis.

The McCone report noted that perhaps the events in LA in 1965 might have been foreseen in hindsight, pointing out that similar, but smaller-scale, disturbances had occurred during the previous summer in New York City, Philadelphia, Chicago, and other cities.¹⁰ But, on the other hand, it also noted that the Watts area didn’t look like the big city slums of the East Coast and the Midwest. In LA, there were small houses in neighborhoods with “trees, parks, and playgrounds.” (p. 3) And the legal segregation of the South – which was the target of the civil rights movement in the mid-1960s – didn’t exist in LA:

“A Negro in Los Angeles has long been able to sit where he wants in a bus or a movie house, to shop where he wishes, to vote, and to use public facilities without discrimination. The opportunity to succeed is probably unequalled in any other major American City.” (p. 3)

⁶U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Special Census Survey of the South and East Los Angeles Areas*, March 23, 1966. Available at <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1966/demo/p23-017.html>. The Spanish surname population was shifting toward East Los Angeles.

⁷U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population and Housing: 1960, Census Tracts, Los Angeles-Long Beach, Calif. Standard Metropolitan Area*, Final Report PCH(1)-82, 1962. Available at <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1961/dec/population-and-housing-phc-1.html>.

⁸U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Quick Facts: Los Angeles County, California*. Available at <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/losangelescountycalifornia>.

⁹U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Special Census Survey of the South and East Los Angeles Areas*, March 23, 1966. Available at <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1966/demo/p23-017.html>.

¹⁰These events were covered in the Times, e.g., “N.Y. Race Riot Rages Violently for 2nd Day,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 19, 1964. Articles cited from this period are available in the ProQuest database.

Given this perception of LA-exceptionalism, the report tries to explain how could the events of Watts have happened? The then-new War on Poverty of the Johnson administration held out promise, but there were delays in LA due to bickering over local control of the funds in LA. So, perhaps there was disappointment in LA and the Watts community when the promise wasn't quickly fulfilled. Moreover, in 1964, California voters had passed Proposition 13 which had overturned a state-level fair housing law.¹¹ Thus, while Southern-style legally-mandated segregation wasn't present in California, individual homeowners could discriminate under Prop 13.

Apart from possible political disappointment, the report pointed to failure in the local educational system, although it saw the failure as stemming from a disadvantaged home life which created learning problems for the schools.

"Unprepared and unready, he may not learn to read or write... The child becomes a discipline problem... Often, he leaves school... (and) slips into the ranks of the permanent jobless..." (p. 5)

A byproduct of these bad outcomes was what was later termed "white flight" from the schools and neighborhoods, according to the Commission. With this diagnosis, the Commission called for job training programs, pre-school educational programs, smaller class-sizes, and remedial education. For McCone, the ultimate problem was unemployment.

Contemporary readers may note the use of "he" in the quote above to describe all children and attribute it to the (politically incorrect?) parlance of the period. It is partially that, but the Commission's language undoubtedly also reflected what became known as the "Moynihan Report" which had been put out earlier in 1965 by the U.S. Department of Labor.¹² The Moynihan Report – which generated

¹¹Voters overturned the Rumford Fair Housing Act in 1964 under Proposition 13. Proposition 13 was later overturned by litigation, but that outcome came later (after the McCone report).

¹²U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Policy Planning and Research, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, March 1965. Available at <https://www.dol.gov/general/aboutdol/history/webid-moynihan>. The report was attributed to Daniel Patrick Moynihan, then an assistant secretary of labor, later a U.S. senator from New York. According to the Moynihan Report [excerpts]:

"The most difficult fact for white Americans to understand is that in these terms the circumstances of the Negro American community in recent years has probably been getting worse, not better. Indices of dollars of income, standards of living, and years of education deceive. The gap between the Negro and most other groups in American society is widening. The fundamental problem, in which this is most clearly the case, is that of family structure. The evidence — not final, but powerfully persuasive — is that the Negro family in the urban ghettos is crumbling... Nearly a quarter of Negro women living in cities who have ever married are divorced, separated, or are living apart from their husbands..."

"As a direct result of this high rate of divorce, separation, and desertion, a very large percent of Negro families are [sic] headed by females. While the percentage of such families among whites has been dropping since 1940, it has been rising among Negroes... The Breakdown of the Negro Family Has Led to a Startling Increase in Welfare Dependency... In essence, the Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure which, because it is out of line with the rest of the American society, seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole, and imposes a crushing burden on the Negro male and, in consequence, on a great many Negro women as well."

"There is, presumably, no special reason why a society in which males are dominant in family relationships is to be preferred to a matriarchal arrangement. However, it is clearly a disadvantage for a minority group to be operating on one principle, while the great majority of the population, and the one with the most advantages to begin with, is

controversy, and thus general public knowledge of its existence at the time - put much emphasis on jobless *men*, the inability of such jobless *men* to head a family. It appeared to have a significant influence on the thinking of the McCone Commission.

Chronology

With this background, the report turned to the actual chronology of what set off the disturbances beginning on August 11, 1965, with a traffic stop by the California Highway Patrol. Since the details of that chronology are well known, there is no point in providing them here. But there is some material in the report on police-community relations because of the triggering event.

The Commission noted that there had been a history of complaints of police brutality. It indicated that the existing structure of oversight of the LAPD was inadequate, and suggested establishment of a civilian review board to handle complaints. Police officers should have training in "*human relations*." And there should be more minority officers. On the other hand, the Commission seemed to take the word of LA Police Chief William H. Parker that he was a fair man and that complaints directed against him personally were unwarranted.

Once violence occurred, and Chief Parker had asked for the state to intervene with the National Guard, delays occurred because Governor Brown was away from California in Greece and Lieutenant Governor Glenn Anderson – who was in Santa Barbara – seemed to dither and delay in his role as acting governor. The report puts the outcome of Watts at 34 dead. There were over 1,000 injuries, and there was damage to property at over \$40 million (which would be well over \$300 million in 2020 dollars).

Underlying Influences

As noted, the Commission saw unemployment as a key underlying factor. Training programs in job skills could address that problem. Better educational outcomes were also part of the process to make the jobless more employable. The training, according to the Commission, should involve direct job skills but also needed was "*'attitudinal training' to help the candidate develop the necessary motivation, certain basic principles of conduct, and essential communication skills...*" (p. 43) To combat discrimination in employment, the Commission proposed new state legislation.

Transportation to areas of where jobs were located needed to be addressed by improved public bus service. (The last remaining line of Los Angeles' once extensive streetcars had disappeared in the early 1960s.) Bus service, however, would need a subsidy to make fares affordable. The welfare system should be tilted towards welfare-to-work. With regard to welfare payments, the Commission mused that the "*generosity*" of payments might be attracting "*the heavy immigration of disadvantaged people*

operating on another. This is the present situation of the Negro. Ours is a society which presumes male leadership in private and public affairs. The arrangements of society facilitate such leadership and reward it. A subculture, such as that of the Negro American, in which this is not the pattern, is placed at a distinct disadvantage."

The Moynihan report quickly became controversial and from time to time new controversies have arisen as historians have looked at its influence. Interested readers will find many references to the debate with a quick web search.

to Los Angeles.” (p. 71) Health issues needed to be addressed and a local hospital should be built in the South LA area.¹³

To accomplish the Commission’s remedial agenda, responsible leadership in the African American community was key, according to its report. But the Commission fretted that the rhetoric of the anti-segregation civil rights movement in the South, which the Commission regarded as inapplicable to Los Angeles, was spilling over into LA:

“The angry exhortations and the resulting disobedience to law in many parts of our nation appear to have contributed importantly to the feeling of rage which made the Los Angeles riots possible... Although the Commission received much thoughtful and constructive testimony from Negro witnesses, we also heard statements of the most extreme and emotional nature... We firmly believe that progress towards ameliorating the current wrongs is difficult in an atmosphere pervaded by these extreme statements.” (p. 85)

All commissioners signed the final report. However, Reverend Jones – one of the two African Americans on the Commission – dissented over two points. He argued against the suggestion that generous welfare payments in Los Angeles were attracting an influx of “disadvantaged peoples.” And he objected to the lecturing tone about the “extreme statements” that had been heard at the Commission hearings. (p. 87) The Commission, he argued, was in no position to tell people what to think or say.

It might be noted that except for some off-hand remarks that problems faced by African Americans might also be faced by Mexican-Americans, the report focused almost entirely on a black-white framework. And the problem was seen as within the African American community; whites were not really part of the solution, except in the sense of legislating and funding reforms and programs.

Consequences

The McCone Commission reflected the perspective of the downtown elite and of the leadership of the *LA Times* of that era. They were initially shocked that Watts could have happened in their city. After all, in their view, LA wasn’t the South, where state-mandated segregation was the issue, and where one might therefore expect problems to arise. But Watts had nonetheless somehow occurred, and the Commission’s focus on excess unemployment seemed to be a reasonable explanation. Something had to be done, and the Commission’s suggestions about training, education, health, transportation, etc., seemed like a convincing plan. In that respect, the McCone Commission report was both a revelation and a direction. Problem discovered; solution found. Now it was time for implementation.

Of course, solution found is not the same as solution actually implemented. The two most tangible legacies of McCone were the creation of a new hospital noted above and the establishment of a new public bus line from South LA that took maids to work in households along Sunset Boulevard in affluent areas of Beverly Hills and Bel Air (a line discontinued in 2004).¹⁴ Contemporary readers may not be

¹³Ultimately, as will be noted below, the Martin Luther King, Jr. hospital was built in response. Various internal scandals closed the hospital for a time, but it now functions with assistance from UCLA.

¹⁴See Caitlin Lu, “MTA Puts the Brakes on the ‘Nanny Express,’” *Los Angeles Times*, December 11, 2004. Available at <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2004-dec-11-me-nanny11-story.html>; Douglas P. Shuit, “Crosstown Bus Links 2 Worlds,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 4, 2000. Available at <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2000-jul-04-mn-47637-story.html>.

impressed with the outcome, particularly with the hindsight that a similar sequence of Watts-type events occurred again in LA in 1992.

But there was also a political legacy. The *LA Times* itself had begun a process of change under its new publisher, Otis Chandler (appointed by the Chandler family in 1960). The *Times* was becoming less a local booster of Republican causes and economic growth in LA and more a national newspaper of high standing. Moreover, the shock of Watts suggested to the local powers-that-were that maybe new municipal leadership was needed. The *LA Times* in particular eventually supported Tom Bradley over Sam Yorty in 1969 and again – this time with a Bradley victory producing the first (and only) African American mayor of Los Angeles – in 1973.

A Political Divide Begins

When the McCone report appeared in early December 1965, the *Times* endorsed its findings and recommendations:

*"The first thing to be said about the McCone Commission's report... is that it should be read and pondered deeply by every citizen concerned with the fate of this community and, indeed, with the condition of American society. The second thing to be said is that the proposed remedial steps in the critical areas of employment, education and police relations not only deserve but demand immediate attention and action... Until these problems are solved – and, in time, there is no reason they can't be – we shall all be weakened."*¹⁵

Mayor Yorty, however, had a different reaction. The City had a limited budget and couldn't finance the kinds of ambitious remedial programs the report suggested. Although the McCone report was "very constructive," according to Yorty, any remedy would have to be based on federal and state funding. And he criticized the *Times* for editorializing that a recent trip he had taken to South Vietnam should have been a lower priority than dealing with the City's now-evident problems. According to Yorty:

*"It would be unfair for the federal and state governments to shirk their responsibility and encourage (movement) to cities without bearing the cost of providing jobs for those who can't find jobs in private industry and the added cost of very expensive remedial school as required when school age children come into an area where the school system is too advanced for them to keep up with regular students."*¹⁶

In short, the shock of Watts and the McCone report was the start of a process by which the views of the *Times* and the powers-that-were in Los Angeles began to separate from those of the mayor.

Pre-Watts: The Yorty Reelection Campaign of 1965 Begins

In a sense, any candidate for office who runs for reelection has been campaigning throughout the previous term of office. But campaign activities heat up once the date of the reelection approaches. The intensity especially accelerates when candidates have to announce and submit the necessary papers to be placed on the ballot. In Los Angeles in the 1960s, as is still the case, mayors were elected for four-

¹⁵Editorial: "McCone Commission Report: I," *Los Angeles Times*, December 7, 1965.

¹⁶Quoted in Erwin Baker and Dick Main, "U.S. Funds Needed to Provide Jobs – Yorty," *Los Angeles Times*, December 9, 1965.

year terms during the spring of the year following a presidential election. In effect, due to the filing requirements, campaign season begins in January of the mayoral election year.

There is first a nonpartisan municipal primary. If no candidate gets a majority in that primary, the top two vote getters compete in a subsequent runoff election. But if a candidate for mayor does receive a majority in the primary, he/she wins at that point and there is no mayoral runoff election needed. Incumbents have an advantage, assuming that the public has a perception that they are doing their jobs reasonably competently. They can simply conspicuously continue doing their job and they will receive (free) news media attention for doing so.

In the 1965 primary, ultimately eight names appeared on the ballot, but only three were considered serious candidates. Yorty, of course, was one of the three and he would surely either be one of the two emerging from the primary – or he would be elected outright at that point. His main rival was Congressional representative James Roosevelt, the eldest son of former president Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The Roosevelt name alone gave James Roosevelt a certain cache with the liberal wing of the Democratic Party. He was the contemporary local embodiment of FDR's New Deal. But Roosevelt's political record was mixed. In 1948, he had opposed the nomination of incumbent Harry Truman who had succeeded to the presidency in 1945 on the death of FDR. Roosevelt pushed instead for the Democratic Party to nominate World War II hero General Dwight Eisenhower.

Eisenhower – as it turned out – was a Republican. In fact, he was the candidate of the Republicans four years later in 1952 who won the presidency. Truman obtained the 1948 nomination despite turmoil in his party and Roosevelt's opposition and won an upset victory in the general election.¹⁷ He did not have a warm spot in his heart for Roosevelt. Roosevelt later ran for governor of California in 1950 without tangible support from Truman and lost to incumbent Republican Earl Warren (with whom Truman had a friendly relationship in spite of their partisan differences). However, Roosevelt did later win the Congressional seat in 1954 that had been earlier held by Yorty.

The third candidate in the 1965 mayoral election was Patrick D. McGee, a former Republican state assembly representative and city council member. McGee had notably tried to hold both positions at the same time, a move that sparked substantial controversy. He eventually stepped down from the state position. Despite this unseemly attempt to hold dual elected positions, it was McGee who, back in 1961, the *LA Times* had initially considered the only potential threat to Mayor Poulson. McGee, however, came in third in the 1961 primary behind Poulson and Yorty. Still, McGee had some residual name recognition in 1965. But he was basically an also-ran in that election, occasionally making news by attacking Yorty or Roosevelt.¹⁸

Unruh vs. Brown

Basically, Roosevelt's line of attack focused on Yorty's penchant for foreign travel, Yorty's bickering with certain members of the city council, and allegations that Yorty was using city employees and resources illegally to support his campaign. State-level political power at that point was divided between Governor Pat Brown and powerful Assembly Speaker Jess ("Big Daddy") Unruh. Yorty seemed to have an alliance

¹⁷The Democrats split three ways in 1948 with the left-wing liberals and the segregationist "Dixiecrats" forming third parties.

¹⁸After his two unsuccessful races for mayor, McGee returned to the state assembly.

with Unruh which Roosevelt attacked. Although Governor Brown didn't officially take sides, he appeared to favor Roosevelt.

The state-level Unruh-Brown tension also reflected itself in an election contest for city council in which the mayor had an interest and involvement. Yorty was in periodic conflict with city council representative Rosalind ("Roz") Wiener Wyman. Wyman had first been elected to the council in 1953 at age 22, the youngest member to have served, a notable accomplishment at the time for a Jewish woman. Oddly, given the later Yorty-Wyman feud, she had been originally encouraged to run for city council in 1953 by an aide to Yorty when he was in Congress.¹⁹

Wyman is often credited as a key player in the effort to bring the Dodgers to LA from Brooklyn. She married a Democratic operative, Eugene Wyman, while in office. Her husband was allied with Governor Brown, an alliance that seemed to be a factor in the feud with Yorty. Yorty had on-and-off battles with Brown over such matters as control of the California delegation to the 1964 Democratic presidential convention.²⁰ Ultimately, Yorty unsuccessfully opposed Brown in the 1966 Democratic gubernatorial primary.

Union Divisions

Organized labor – which had become a significant force in local politics – was split over what to do in the 1965 mayoral campaign. From an ideological perspective, labor unions tended to be aligned with Roosevelt and were happy with his record in Congress. But they also saw value in keeping him in Congress. They had no particular beef with Yorty and generally liked his pushing for civic improvements that meant jobs for union members, especially in the building trades. Why pick a fight with a satisfactory incumbent such as Yorty, particularly since he was a nominal Democrat?

Ultimately, after much internal strife, the local AFL-CIO unions did back Roosevelt. The independent Teamsters union (not part of the AFL-CIO) endorsed both Yorty *and* Roosevelt, in effect saying either one was OK so there was no need to choose sides.²¹ The problem for Roosevelt was that if your allies have a public fight as to whether or not they endorse you, their eventual endorsement is worth less than an exhibition of full and united enthusiasm from the start. It's a bit like the joke about a hospital patient receiving a card saying the folks at work have voted 5-to-4 to wish you a speedy recovery. Furthermore, some local unions within the umbrella County Federation of Labor (AFL-CIO) nonetheless supported Yorty.

Contentious Issues

In the early part of the campaign, Roosevelt unearthed a potential Yorty scandal linked to Unruh. It appeared that Unruh had pressured a local Democratic congressional representative to assign an individual on his federal payroll to work in the Yorty campaign. Unruh denied doing it and Yorty denied knowing about it and the scandal didn't go anywhere. Generally, the various charges made by Roosevelt

¹⁹Ed Ainsworth, *Maverick Mayor: A Biography of Sam Yorty, Mayor of Los Angeles* (Doubleday & Co., 1966), pp. 180-181; UCLA oral history with Samuel Yorty: "Ask the Mayor," 1987, pp. 115-117. Available at https://archive.org/stream/askmayororalhist00yort/askmayororalhist00yort_divu.txt and <https://archive.org/details/askmayororalhist00yort/mode/2up>.

²⁰John C. Bollens and Grant B. Geyer, *Yorty: Politics of a Constant Candidate* (Palisades Publishers, 1973), chapter 16.

²¹The national Teamsters union had been ejected from the AFL-CIO at the time on charges of corruption.

(and by McGee) failed to stick. It wasn't so much that Yorty was a Teflon mayor. It was just that nothing dramatic was going wrong in Los Angeles during the campaign, even though they were soon thereafter to go very wrong.

If there was a controversial issue during the campaign, it involved the location of a proposed municipal convention center. Yorty wanted it to be built in Elysian Park and was supported in that position by organized labor and by the local Chamber of Commerce. There were proposals to have a California World's Fair in LA at the time, and the convention center would be part of that endeavor. However, the Coliseum Commission, which would be involved in the construction, wanted it in Exposition Park. Roosevelt favored that Exposition Park location. Ultimately, a save-the-park movement kept it out of Elysian Park and – in the end – the convention center was built, but in neither park.²²

The Busy Mayor

During the first two months of the mayoral campaign, what City residents would have been reading about in terms of mayoral activity is Yorty in various civic meetings and celebrations. He attended the dedication of the Venice Pier, unveiled a monument and a portrait of George Washington, attended events held by Jewish women's groups, declared Toastmistress Week, attended the dedication of the International Student Center at UCLA, attended the awards of the Directors' Guild, etc.

Announcements by Mayor Yorty were made of support for a parks bond, support for expansion of the Port of LA, support for a state park in the Santa Monica Mountains. The mayor welcomed the prime minister of Japan. He attended meetings of various charitable/fundraising groups. Yorty announced street improvements in the San Fernando Valley and attended the opening of a helicopter service from the Van Nuys airport to the Los Angeles Airport. A children's petting zoo, it was announced, would be opened by Yorty.²³

Yorty announced cuts in electricity rates of the LA Department of Water and Power and synchronization of traffic lights to reduce congestion. He weighed in on the location of a proposed federal office building in the San Fernando Valley. And he indicated there would be a study of a proposed rapid transit system that could be constructed over freeways.

Yorty hobnobbed with the downtown elite at the exclusive California Club where a UCLA fundraiser was taking place, although he had been protesting UCLA's acquisition of an apartment house in Westwood for graduate student housing. The Club was criticized during its history for its ban on women as well as racial exclusion and antisemitism, policies later changed and outlawed. But Yorty also attended a talk by Martin Luther King, Jr. and separately set February 25th as Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.²⁴

Although Yorty had in the past feuded with African American city council representative Billy Mills, now, at the request of Mills, he met with representatives of CORE (the Congress of Racial Equality) who wanted Police Chief Parker to be fired. Yorty did not have the power to fire Parker, but he promised to

²²Echo Park Historical Society, "Grace E. Simons: The Defender of Elysian Park." Available at <http://historicechopark.org/history-landmarks/people/grace-e-simons/>. The Convention Center was built, and later expanded, at the intersection of the 10 and 110 freeways.

²³The current Los Angeles Zoo was being planned and constructed in this era, but it was not opened until 1966. A smaller zoo operated in Griffith Park.

²⁴Martin Luther King Jr. Day was not observed as a national holiday until 1986 (pursuant to a law enacted in 1983).

consider complaints of discrimination against city departments. Mills and two African American state assembly representatives, Mervyn Dymally and F. Douglas Ferrell, endorsed Yorty for reelection. During a ceremony saluting what was then called "Negro History Week," Yorty praised the role of African Americans in the growth of LA.

By March, the campaigns had moved into high gear. McGee tried to obtain support from Republicans, since he was a registered Republican, and Yorty was a registered Democrat. Nevertheless, Yorty appeared at local Republican clubs, taking the stance that he was really bipartisan, and reminding his audiences of his support for Nixon over Kennedy in 1960. Former Republican Governor Goodwin ("Goody") Knight endorsed Yorty, not McGee. McGee said his two principal opponents – Yorty and Roosevelt – were left-wing Democrats. But Yorty repeatedly claimed that *he* was the one being targeted by left-wingers associated with Roosevelt. Despite McGee's efforts, the race was clearly becoming Yorty vs. Roosevelt.

The Incumbent Advantage

Yorty continued to have the advantage of an incumbent. He was always in the news, talking to religious groups, service organizations, charitable fundraisers, etc. He visited Mexico. He proclaimed "Poison Prevention Week. He dedicated a new sewage system. He rededicated Travel Town in Griffith Park. He held a reception in his home for Mexican-American leaders. He announced street improvements in the civic center area. He greeted British World War II hero Lord Mountbatten at City Hall. And he also greeted a visiting blind Japanese musician. He gave a keynote address to a meeting of the LA Press Club. He traveled to a hearing of the House Unamerican Activities Committee in Washington, DC to denounce extreme right-wing groups and local Nazis. He pushed for more defense spending in LA.

Given all of this activity, it was hard for rivals to make news. But they tried. Yorty was attacked by Roosevelt and McGee for his tax-payer financed membership in the downtown Jonathan Club, although for different reasons. Roosevelt complained that the Jonathan Club was discriminatory and didn't admit African Americans. McGee attacked Roosevelt for injecting the racial issue about the Club into the campaign but, on the other hand, argued that taxpayers shouldn't be paying the mayor's dues.

Yorty pointed to African American appointments in his administration. Roosevelt charged that Yorty's appointments were just tokenism. While boasting of his African American appointments, Yorty nonetheless complained that *"a lot of people have come here from the South with a belligerent attitude toward police officers."* The police were doing a fine job and, in LA, *"we don't permit any beatings or brutality."*²⁵ Police Chief Parker made a point of noting in public that under Yorty, he experienced *"less interference"* in running his agency than under prior mayors.²⁶ From his point of view, and he presumed the viewpoint of most voters, that lack of intervention was a Good Thing.

The Times Steps In

Shortly before the April 1965 primary, the *LA Times* published two editorials supporting Yorty over Roosevelt. The first on March 28 had to explain the 180 degree turn in *Times* policy as compared with its stance in 1961:

²⁵Quoted in "Yorty Decries 'Low-Level' Vote Appeals," *Los Angeles Times*, April 1, 1965.

²⁶Quoted in Paul Beck, "Roosevelt Claims 'Deal' Between Parker, Yorty," *Los Angeles Times*, April 4, 1965.

"It is a proven fact of political life that most men undergo a sea-change, for better or worse, once they gain public office. Many who come to power with great original promise fade into mediocrity. Others with much less potential emerge as competent executives before their first term ends. Mayor Samuel W. Yorty falls into the latter category... Since 1961... Yorty has demonstrated an aptitude for handling municipal problems which is distinctly heartening..."

The editorial goes on to credit Yorty with such positive attributes as *"fiscal responsibility"* and support for a new zoo, for the Elysian Park convention center, and for a park in the Santa Monica Mountains. On the other hand, the *Times* noted that despite the plusses of Yorty as mayor, it opposed some of his attempts in various ways to gather more authority into the mayor's office. But it favored *"his successful fight to maintain a strong police department in the face of unreasonable demands that Chief Parker be summarily dismissed, along with his devotion to better race relations."*²⁷

A second editorial on April 2 made the *Times'* case against Roosevelt. Basically, Roosevelt was depicted as having a lack of knowledge and realism about city affairs. He mistakenly opposed the Elysian Park convention center plan, he mistakenly opposed redevelopment (urban renewal) of Bunker Hill in downtown LA, and he lacked understanding of the costs of building a rapid transit system. *"In short, although Roosevelt's intentions may be the very best, ...he betrays a naivete concerning the city's growth problems which casts serious doubt upon his ability to handle them."*²⁸ The *Times* did not explain why, given its admittedly negative misjudgment of Yorty in 1961, readers should this time trust its opinion of Roosevelt.

The Primary Election Result and Its Aftermath

Whether because of the *Times* support of Yorty, or just because of a perception that things in LA were OK, Yorty received 58% of the votes in the primary a few days later, thus securing reelection as mayor without a runoff. Roosevelt received 36% and McGee, 5%. Moreover, his nemesis, Rosalind Wiener Wyman, was forced into a runoff against newcomer Ed Edelman who would in fact defeat her in the second contest and go on to a long career on the city council and as a county supervisor. (The *Times* had supported Wyman.) In terms of state politics, the result is seen in hindsight as the beginning of the end for Governor Brown's career. Brown was allied with the losers Roosevelt and Wyman and would himself go on to defeat by Ronald Reagan in the gubernatorial election of 1966.

In the period between the primary and the events of Watts, there was the luck of timing from the Yorty perspective. Shortly after the primary, a scandal emerged involving bribing of city building inspectors. Such a scandal before the primary might have reduced the Yorty margin of votes, possibly forcing him into a runoff. It also became clear that the holding of a California World's Fair in LA in 1968-69, aimed at attracting tourism and economic activity, was unlikely to happen. Bickering over War on Poverty funding continued, leading eventually to a brief sit-in in the mayor's office by CORE. From a political viewpoint, it was best for Yorty that such developments had come after the primary.

Tension between Yorty and council member Tom Bradley began to take shape with regard to the police, a tension that would frame the 1969 and 1973 mayoral elections in which the two faced off. Yorty attacked Bradley for being anti-police:

²⁷Quotes from Editorial: "Best for Mayor: Samuel Yorty," *Los Angeles Times*, March 28, 1965.

²⁸Editorial: "Why Yorty, Not Roosevelt?" *Los Angeles Times*, April 2, 1965.

*"We have one city councilman who seems to want to make news by using the Police Department as a whipping boy to further his own political ambitions. I regard this as very serious because I've noticed since he started his attacks there has been a different tone in the Negro press. Lately, I've seen a lot of articles that give me a lot of concern. I think we should try to get straightened out with Bradley to see what's going on here..."*²⁹

But for the most part, the flow of civic events continued as before the election. The Mexican ambassador and the president of South Korea visited with Yorty. Yorty attended a dinner for the departing Israeli consul general. Proclamations were issued by the mayor for Travel Week, Realtor Week, Salvation Army Week, and Be Kind to Animals Week. Some of Yorty's proclamations involved only 24 hours, not a full week, e.g., Theater Organ Day. But all of them made news and engendered goodwill from the beneficiaries.

After some debate, a new city budget was enacted, a planning group was set up for the proposed park in the Santa Monica Mountains, a new road project was announced for the San Fernando Valley, and a canal improvement project was approved for Venice. Yorty welcomed delegates of the California Federation of Women's Clubs to a conference at the Biltmore. A ceremonial shovel was turned by Yorty for a new fire station in Pacific Palisades and a new post office was dedicated in the San Fernando Valley. Yorty participated in a fundraising campaign for the private Harvard School (now Harvard-Westlake). In late July, he attended an inaugural ball for himself and others elected in the spring municipal elections. Not long after, the events of Watts occurred.

Coverage of African American and Mexican-American Issues in the *LA Times*

In the pre-Watts period, and during the 1965 municipal election season, issues related to the Mexican-American community were covered in the *LA Times*, but in a limited fashion. Much of the coverage involved the ending of the Bracero program which had brought temporary workers from Mexico to harvest farm crops beginning in World War II. Once that program ended, farmers complained of labor shortages and the *Times* regarded these complaints sympathetically and pushed for some kind of renewed program.

Interesting and contentious as this agricultural issue was, it had little to do with Mexican-Americans residing in the urban areas served by the *Times*. Occasionally, items appeared taking note of scholarships won by local Mexican-American students. Or there might be note taken of celebratory events. For example, Mayor Yorty attended a ceremony at Olvera Street, the tourist attraction featuring historic buildings, Mexican restaurants, and Mexican-oriented retail stores. At Olvera Street, Yorty proclaimed LA to be "*an amalgam of all origins, races and creeds.*"³⁰ (Olvera Street, it might be noted, was a creation in the 1930s of the *LA Times*, in conjunction with other promoters, as a tourist attraction.)

As pointed out in the context of the later McCone Commission report, Mexican-Americans at the time were considered to be the other minority. In part because of the very dramatic confrontations over civil rights and segregation of African Americans in the South, there was much coverage of those events in

²⁹Quoted in Erwin Baker, "Yorty Raps Bradley on Police Criticism," *Los Angeles Times*, April 28, 1965. The issue at the time involved the shooting of an unarmed Hollywood carpenter after a traffic stop, discussed below.

³⁰"Yorty Acclaimed as Los Angeles 'Alcalde,'" *Los Angeles Times*, May 21, 1965.

the *Times*.³¹ But, of course, those events were taking place somewhere else; a connection to those events with conditions in LA was neither emphasized nor much recognized in the *Times* before Watts.

In LA, in contrast with the South, conflicts could be worked out by people of good will, in the view of the *Times*. And it provided examples. A lengthy article appeared in mid-June 1965 describing an ongoing seminar program sponsored by UCLA Extension in which people of different backgrounds read books, heard lectures, and talked about their various perspectives.³² Reform Jewish Temples invited African American churches to participate in Passover seders.³³ An experiment with busing of children from South LA to two public elementary schools on the Westside was financed through private philanthropy.

Nonetheless, there were warnings that such kumbaya moments might not be the whole story. For example, one of UCLA's most prominent African American graduates, United Nations undersecretary general Ralph Bunche, warned at UCLA that there were those folks in the community who felt the civil rights movement was not going fast enough.³⁴ Despite such warnings, as far as local issues were concerned, or even protests aimed at events elsewhere, moderation was seen as the best approach according to the *Times*:

*"The moderates, better armed than ever before with new laws and governmental willingness to enforce them, urge greater reliance on political power to fulfill Negro objectives. The militants, meanwhile, (call) for stepped-up use of direct action techniques, often without regard to their possible consequences."*³⁵

The *Times* did cover what local African American and Mexican-American *politicians* were doing and saying. It took note of the conflict over control of federal War on Poverty funding that was later identified in the McCone report and which involved tensions between various African American and Mexican-American groups and the mayor (and indirectly between Brown and Unruh). There were also tensions when African American city council representative Billy Mills and assembly representative Mervyn Dymally endorsed a Mexican-American candidate for the LA Board of Education, Ralph Poblano, over the Reverend James Edward Jones, an African American.³⁶ (Jones won and – as noted earlier – later served on the McCone Commission.)

What is now termed Black History Month – then known as Negro History Week – was the occasion for *Times* coverage of various programs around the city related to race relations; for example, at UCLA and Claremont Men's College in February 1965. Earlier, the *Times* had a front page interview with Chancellor Franklin Murphy about student unrest at UCLA; the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley was already underway and was receiving national attention. Murphy indicated that student unrest was in part tied to *"the treatment of the Negro (which) has gotten through to today's bright students as nothing else has in a long time."*³⁷

³¹For example, the marches from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama took place in March 1965.

³²Art Seidenbaum, "The Space for Race in a Hopeful Los Angeles," *Los Angeles Times*, June 13, 1965.

³³"Reformed Jews to Ask Negroes to Temple Rite," *Los Angeles Times*, April 3, 1965.

³⁴"Bunche Assails Truman Over Blasts at King," *Los Angeles Times*, April 22, 1965.

³⁵Editorial: "Excesses in the Rights Movement," *Los Angeles Times*, July 6, 1965.

³⁶Poblano continued a career in education and eventually became the ombudsperson for San Jose State University. He did not make it beyond the primary, however. In the runoff that followed, Mills and Dymally switched their support to Jones.

³⁷Quoted in William Trombley, "UCLA Chancellor Views Future of Restless Students," *Los Angeles Times*, January 24, 1965.

Police Issues

As far as relations with the police, the *Times* did report on charges against the Police Department but did not perceive incidents or complaints as symptoms of a systematic problem. When a white police officer who was a member of CORE was apparently suspended for his protest activities, a hearing was held. The officer testified that the Department was “a bastion of bigotry” and practice *de facto* segregation in job assignments, those opinions were reported.³⁸ But the reporting stopped there.

When an unarmed (white) Hollywood studio carpenter with no criminal record was shot and killed in a traffic stop in February 1965 and the event was ruled a justifiable homicide, the facts were also reported.³⁹ Witness testimony contradicted what the police said had occurred. Council member Tom Bradley tried unsuccessfully to have a thorough hearing on the shooting.⁴⁰ The *Times* did not look further into the details of such occurrences. It just reported what was said.

Of course, the McCone Commission -- while suggesting a civilian police review board for complaints -- also in the end did not put blame on Police Chief Parker. Parker had dealt with earlier police corruption and had professionalized the Department. He had supported the 1950s popular TV program, *Dragnet*, whose hero, Sargent Friday, portrayed as a kind of human Robocop, always got his man and protected the (often hapless) residents of LA from evildoers.

The downtown establishment never turned on Parker despite Watts. In June 1966, less than a year after Watts, Parker -- was being honored for his service to the City at a downtown hotel banquet when he collapsed and died of a heart attack.⁴¹ But his successors as police chief viewed him as an example to be followed. The police headquarters building was named after Parker. When events similar to Watts repeated in LA in 1992, the police chief at the time, Daryl Gates, had served as Parker's driver and bodyguard.

When the events of Watts took place, the *Times* had no African American reporters. It did have an African American messenger in the sales department who described what he had seen in Watts to the editorial staff and was quickly converted into a reporter.⁴² But what that situation meant was that the *Times*, while it could cover the doings of African American political figures and celebrities, was not in a position to have any direct knowledge of the kinds of socio-economic indicators featured in the McCone report. In 2020, although much had changed, the *Times* was still wrestling with this heritage and

³⁸Howard Hertel, “Hannon Hits Police Dept. for Bigotry,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 8, 1965.

³⁹Grudt was identified in some much later accounts as African American. However, Census records from 1940 identify him as white. The mistake appears in Felicia Angeja Viator, *Gangster Boogie: Los Angeles and the Rise of Gangsta Rap, 1965-1992*, PhD dissertation, Department of History, University of California-Berkeley, 2012, pp. 22-23. Available at https://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/etd/ucb/text/Viator_berkeley_0028E_12902.pdf. Had there been a racial element involved, the *Times* would likely have mentioned it.

⁴⁰The City eventually settled the case in 1971 for \$150,000. “\$150,000 Awarded to Police Victim's Kin,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 11, 1971.

⁴¹After the events of Watts, Parker had predicted a growing African American population in LA and warned, “you’re going to have to get in and support a strong police department. If you don’t, come 1970, God help you.” Quoted in Kevin Starr, *Golden Dreams: California in an Age of Abundance, 1950-1963* (Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 188.

⁴²Daina Beth Solomon and Dexter Thomas, “Urban legend about Times reporting during Watts riots conceals a sadder tale,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 14, 2015. Available at <https://www.latimes.com/local/wattsriots/la-me-watts-richardson-20150814-story.html>.

published a review of what it viewed with hindsight as blind spots in its history with regard to racial matters.⁴³

Learning from History

So, what do we learn from events of 1965 and Mayor Yorty's reelection campaign? With hindsight, we can see later events beginning to take shape. The fact that the events of Watts roughly repeated in 1992, and to some extent in 2020, would undoubtedly have surprised the powers-that-were in LA back in 1965. After all, the problem had been diagnosed and the solution proposed by a respected commission. Surely, with goodwill, the needed reforms would be implemented.

When it later became apparent that Mayor Yorty was not going to be the one to do the implementing, the *Times* and the downtown elite formed an alliance with local liberals, the African American community, and the Westside Jewish community to elect Tom Bradley as mayor (although it took two contests with Yorty to do it). At the same time, due in part to the changing demographics of the City, political power became diffused. It became harder for any elite to control the course of events. Thanks to the internet, the *LA Times* found its subscriber and revenue bases undermined and went through bankruptcy. It no longer has the influence over local policy that it once had.

We like to look back at history with the idea that today we are much more enlightened and prescient about what should be done than folks were in the past. This chapter was written 55 years after Yorty's reelection of 1965, the events of Watts, and the McCone report. Maybe the chief lesson is that someone looking back in time 55 years from now might well wonder how folks in our time could have been blind to whatever is yet to come and could have failed to propose and/or implement needed remedies.

⁴³Editorial: "An examination of The Times' failures on race, our apology and a path forward," *Los Angeles Times*, September 27, 2020. Available at <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2020-09-27/los-angeles-times-apology-racism>.



California Policy Options 2021

UCLA

Luskin
School of Public Affairs